

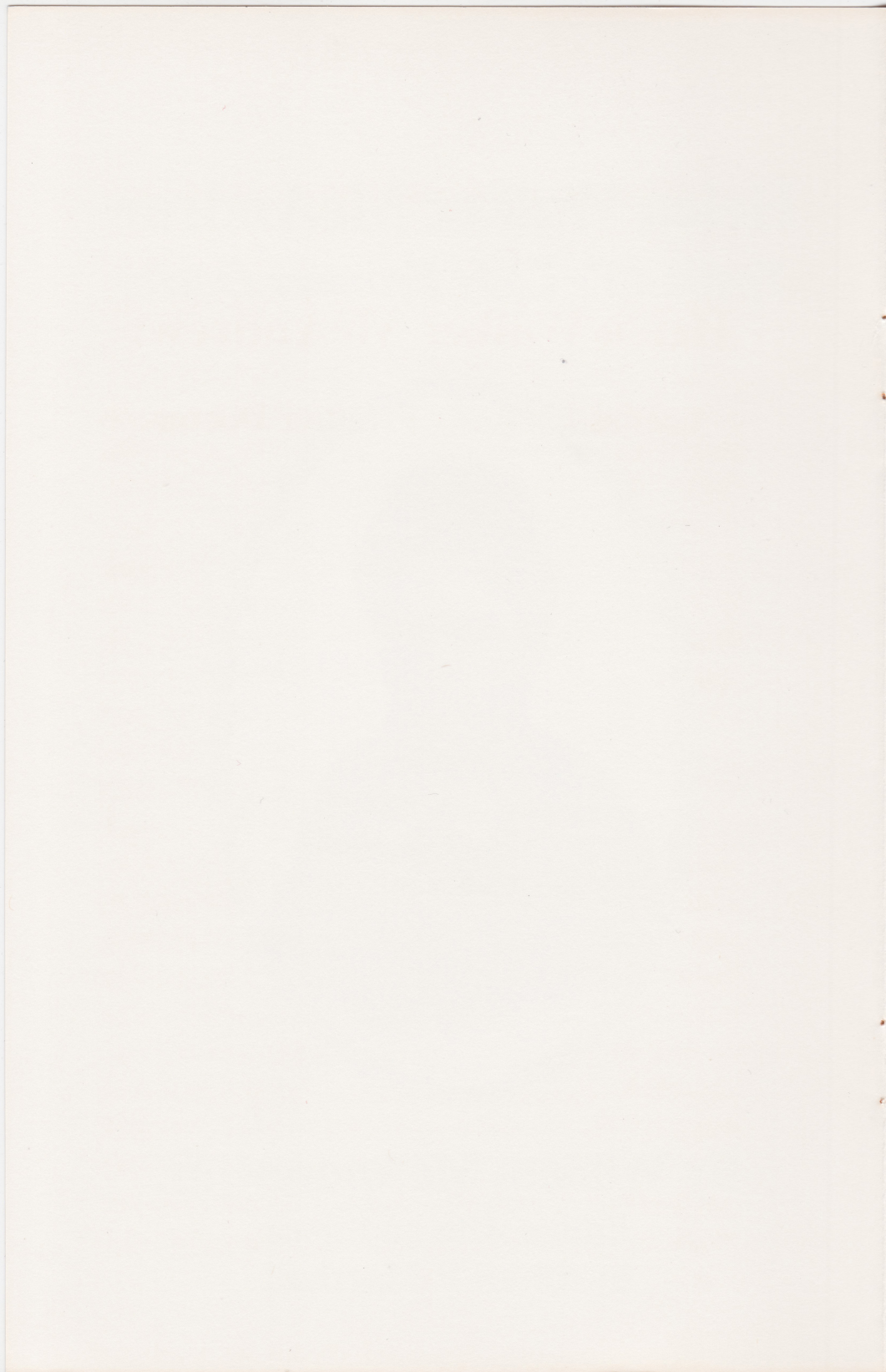
# **Helen Walker McAndrew**

## *Ypsilanti's Lady Frontier Doctor*



**By William McAndrew, Jr.**

**Edited with additions  
by Albert P. Marshall**





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**Albert P. Marshall**

**Professor Emeritus, Eastern Michigan University**

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My gratitude to Doris Milliman, City Historian and Billie Zolkosky, Archivist, both of the Ypsilanti Historical Museum, and to Atwood McAndrew, Jr., who contributed to this book's factual correctness. To my wife, Ruthe, my thanks for encouraging and cajoling me toward the completion of this important segment of local history.

A.P.M.



# Introduction

The efforts of many people go into the cauldron of ideas, mores, philosophies, and ethical values of a village, town or city. There are a few which are so worthy of attention that special efforts to make them known are necessary. The life of Helen Walker McAndrew is one of those people.

She was a person who allowed no one to proscribe how she should live her life. Her convictions resulted in action, whether they concerned her love for mankind or her love and concern for her family. Called "Ypsilanti's first women's libber" by a journalist thirty years after her death, she surely was deserving of the term.

I was also influenced by the fact that Dr. McAndrew was involved with the Underground Railroad and continued an interest in the lives of African Americans throughout her life. So little is known about many people who played leading roles on the behalf of abolishing slavery. When slavery was no longer in existence, this Scottish woman remained a friend to the darker citizens. That kind of humanity continues to gain my attention – and applause.

A.P.M.



# *Helen Walker McAndrew*

## *Ypsilanti's Lady Frontier Doctor*

Of the many migrants who left Europe to seek their fortunes in America, Helen McAndrew and her husband, William, were among those destined to leave deep impressions upon Ypsilanti and its environs. Helen, in particular, succeeded in enriching the lives of an entire community while helping to lay foundations for moral and cultural growth in a future yet to be.

Helen and William McAndrew came just twenty-seven years after the Woodruff dream became Ypsilanti. The community was just seven years into its second generation of growth and development. The spirit of the growing country, as reflected in the thriving village, was quickly absorbed by the young Scot couple who saw opportunities for themselves and grasped them tenaciously.

The newlyweds soon made friends with earlier arrivals who had already caught the spirit of the first generation settlers and who were now helping to shape the character of the Village of Ypsilanti. Mark Norris had arrived in 1827, and with his busi-



ness acumen, established a clothing factory. Lyman Wiard, John Stockdale, Jacob Larzelere, and Salmon Champion, among others, came within five years after Norris and gave heart to a growing business climate. It is likely that the McAndrews came to know such people of color as James Trust, Robert Morton, Sanford Wells, and Richard Spofford, all budding entrepreneurs, and despite limitations placed upon them by nineteenth century society, also helped to shape the future of the village. The McAndrews arrived in 1850, the same year that George McCoy moved his formerly indentured wife and their family from Canada, and no doubt were drawn to each other through a common interest in helping fellow human beings who also sought freedom.

Helen Walker was born in Kirkintilloch, Scotland, on February 6, 1826. Her father, Thomas Walker, was described as "an old Covenanter of praying and fighting stock." No mention of her mother appears in records available. As a young woman, Helen moved to Glasgow where she found work as an apprentice bookbinder.

William McAndrew was born on November 28, 1824, at Perth, and as a young man moved to Glasgow to ply his trade as a cabinet maker. The young couple met through church activities and soon became engaged. They decided to leave for America



immediately after their marriage. The year was 1849.

Following their nuptials, William with his tool box, and Helen with some of her favorite reading materials – including a leather bound *Bible* done with her own hands, Robert Burn's *Poems*, John Bunyan's *Works*, and a collection of William Shakespeare's *Works* – left the banks of the Clyde River for an eleven-week trip to Sandy Hook, New Jersey.

While searching for a place to stay, “a genial stranger with a fine Scottish burr in his voice welcomed the young couple to the land of the free and offered to show them a lodging house.” Shouldering the box of tools, the stranger disappeared into the crowd, never to be seen again.

The couple seemed to be searching for a community which would meet their expectations, one where their own interests and talents would mesh to the advantage of their neighbors and themselves. Perth Amboy, New Jersey was their next stop, but proud of its “new railway station, satisfaction with its mainland location, and a willingness to wait for prosperity to catch up to them, caused the” young Scots to judge it unsuitable.

Moving on to the City of Baltimore, Maryland, the couple's passion to help unfortunate Ne-



groes by teaching them to read and write was contrary to the existing slavery mentality, and put their presence in jeopardy. They got the message and prepared to move on.

The West beckoned. As soon as enough money was saved, they were off again. Passage was booked on a packet-boat to the Chesapeake Bay. They eventually entered the Susquehanna, on the way to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. From there, they made their way to Pittsburgh, and then down the Ohio for a distance before using another canal to Cleveland, and then embarked for Detroit on another side-wheel steamer. Hearing of a small but thriving settlement called Rawsonville, where there was a piano factory, some woolen and flour mills, a couple of hotels, and some retail stores, they were on the move again.

Once there, William's skills were in demand and he was employed as a builder of piano and melodian cases for the growing instrument industry. Eventually, however, because the railroad was routed through Ypsilanti, commerce changed courses. An entire day was lost transporting goods to Ypsilanti to be put aboard the railroad. The couple moved again. Here they would spend the rest of their lives as prominent citizens.



As the couple settled into their new hometown, their philosophical differences with slavery moved them to get involved with the Underground Railroad. Drawn again to those unfortunate people who were seeking to be free, they found few hindrances to their desires to help. Escapees were often hidden in their home by day, and then driven in special wagons to Trenton, from whence they were carried by boat across the river into Canada, and freedom.

William found numerous opportunities for his woodworking skills. Helen, on the other hand, was not content with the limitations of a housewifery role. Soon she was helping her new neighbors with their health problems, especially those of their children. She discovered within herself a dormant interest in nursing, and went on to acquire several books on the subject. Knowing full well the views of many people which placed the practice of medicine off limits to women, she was caught up in the challenges provided by a growing country, undaunted by the refusal of the University of Michigan and other regional colleges to admit women for medical training. She learned of a school in New York City which specialized in the training of women physicians.

Shortly after the completion of their new home at 16 South Huron, their first child, Thomas, was born



on June 24, 1852. William later completed an octagon-shaped house at 105 South Huron, and it was there that their second son, William, was born on August 20, 1863.



Helen convinced her husband that she should follow her dream. Encouraging this move were three local male doctors. Leaving young Thomas and her husband in the care of a Negro housekeeper, she soon headed east, paying for her passage by working as a cook's helper on Erie Canal steamers.

Once in the Metropolis, she convinced authorities of New York City's Traill Institute to permit her enrollment. Her expenses were earned by working as a bookbinder and nurse.

As related by her son, William, "In time she grasps the coveted diploma [October 25, 1855] and



with a few medical books returns to the growing town, a doctor. It isn't nice; it isn't respectable. The men physicians turn up their noses. The town doesn't think it likes this sort of thing. Only Negroes and poor whites come into her office."

One of the leading citizens and businessmen in town was Samuel Post. For some time, he had sought medical help for his ailing wife. Several doctors had been consulted, but none brought her relief. As he walked through his flower garden one day, the gardener suggested that Post should try the "little Scotch woman doctor" who had recently opened an office. Anxious to find a cure for his wife, Post invited Dr. McAndrew to pay her a visit.

Now Helen was trained as a homeopathic physician. She was a water enthusiast, and built her practice on the water cure and the use of natural medicines. She appropriately came to call her office and sanatorium "The Rest For the Weary Water Cure." Water from a nearby mineral well was piped into her home. A wooden bridge led from her office down to the Huron River where she often sent patients to clean themselves. Her son wrote that she "put in vapor baths, shower baths, mineral baths, sitz baths and preached a new gospel of scrubbing the mind clean of all meanness, selfishness, greed, conceit, intolerance, and sin – outside and inside."



Dr. McAndrew entered the home of the Posts, and after observing the circumstances, proceeded to open all the windows. She then emptied all the bottles of medicine down the drain. The patient's bed was moved so that she had a view of the "green lawn and the shady street." On this and succeeding visits, her patient was assured with, "You're looking brighter, little lady." As Mrs. Post's outlook improved, the doctor promised, "If this keeps up, you'll be lifting full flour barrels very soon."

Mrs. Post did get well and lived for many years, joining her husband in spreading enthusiasm for the lady doctor. It is said that Post often remarked, "She's a very superior woman. There's no nonsense about her; she knows the laws of health and she works along with them."

The doctor was sought often for confinement cases, and a goodly portion of children born over the next fifty years were first held in her hands and got their first baths from her.

Unlike other doctors of the time, Dr. Helen continued her concern for the African Americans who came to her. She treated them as human beings, and did not fret if they could not pay at the moment. Thus she was endeared to two generations of descendents of slaves as well as all the poor elements of the city.



The "Rest for the Weary Water Cure" was soon very well known. In an October 1870 issue of *The Commercial*, a portion of the diary of Ella Pattison described dramatically a week spent at The Water Cure. She related coming to visit an aunt who was a patient at "Rest for the Weary", but also to reap some of the benefits herself. The wholesome and healthy menus served thrice daily were described. The article also provided a description of the building and grounds and available swimming facilities. The sights which could be taken in from the river, as well as such attractions as the home of the Gilberts to the south, round out the account of her week with Dr. McAndrew. (See Page 14.)

Writing lovingly of his parents, William McAndrew, Jr. referred to the couple as "forever in the salvage movements of the day." In addition to their activity on behalf of the movement to abolish slavery, the couple "entered heart and soul into the war on the liquor saloon." Their afternoon Temperance Sunday School "had the best part of the Normal school working [evenings] in the barn and in Hewitt Hall." There they practiced skits and light operas to get the message out about the evils of drink. In 1870, Dr. McAndrew organized "The Band of Hope", a youth group which met in her home every Wednesday for more than a decade. She had been a member of a similar group in Glasgow in 1847.



The young doctor was among those exerting pressure to have women admitted to the University of Michigan College of Medicine, a feat accomplished in 1860.

Her husband seemed to lead the way in the practice of a mystical religion which promised the early coming of the Lord. William constructed a small worship building northeast of town. He was the preacher, the choir, and the sexton to a congregation of three families, including his own. The belief of this sect was that it was unnecessary to keep excess earnings, so most of what William made went to causes he felt were worthy.

Both were avid readers of history, travel, and religious books, along with current magazines and newspapers. Helen believed that mental exercise fueled intelligence. She reportedly carried with her a small mental arithmetic booklet to exercise her mind during periods of idleness.

So far as medical service was concerned, Dr. McAndrew had a singleness of purpose. She responded at any hour of the night. Her buggy was a usual sight around town, often signaling the birth of a new baby.

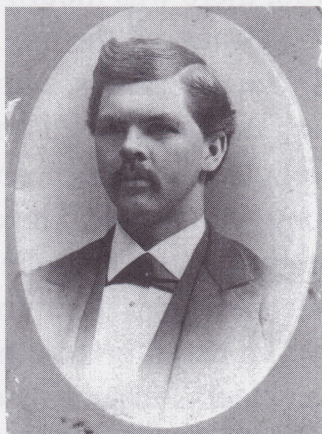
Neither of the McAndrews “pushed for a high



place in the community.” She often worked with women’s groups, and when burning issues dictated, “led committees of women to town meetings” where their proposals were laid before the town council in no uncertain terms. Yet she was “a quiet, modest woman with a genius for friendship, enjoying nothing so much as a chat and a cup of tea before the fire.”

When the Salvation Army established a post in Ypsilanti, the McAndrews “marched the streets with the same grim determination to back up some despised reform that they had shown for abolition when it wasn’t respectable.”

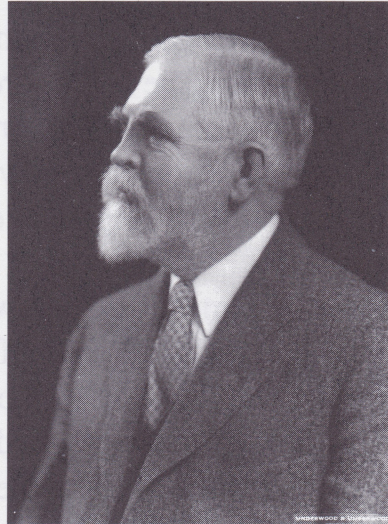
Thomas McAndrew followed his father’s inclination and entered the furniture business in Ypsilanti. His wife, Alice Rowley, an orphan born in Dundee, Michigan, had been adopted into the McAndrew home when she was eleven. Until recent years, the Mack and Mack Furniture Store was a landmark in downtown Ypsilanti. The couple made their home at 301 South Washington from 1883 where they spent the rest of their lives.



Thomas McAndrew



William graduated from Michigan State Normal and then received a Ph.D. degree from the University of Michigan. He became a strong and militant educational leader over the next thirty years. He first taught at Pratt Institute in New York, serving later as Principal of the Washington Irving High School. From New York City where he served as Assistant School Superintendent, he went on to the Superintendency of the Chicago Public Schools where he spent the rest of his professional career.



William McAndrew, Jr.

When Helen McAndrew died on October 26, 1906, there was mourning throughout the city. African Americans, who were still considered on the bottom rungs of society, mourned her passing along with others. The equal treatment and concern for their lives which she tendered to them at all times endeared her as a heroine to African Americans. The story of her efforts on their behalf were kept alive by their elders. An account of her life and death appeared on the front page of the *Ypsilanti Daily Press* on October 27, 1906.



Her husband, William, preceded his wife in death on October 22, 1895.



Helen Walker McAndrew



William McAndrew

*On October 20, 1994, Dr. Helen Walker McAndrew was inducted into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame in Lansing, Michigan.*



**A WEEK'S DIARY AT THE  
"REST FOR THE WEARY" WATER CURE,  
YPSILANTI, MAY 1878**

by Ella Pattison

(Printed in *The Ypsilanti Commercial*,  
October, 1870)

"I came here this morning to spend a week visit with an aunt who was also here to reap the benefits of the Water-Cure. When I arrived, my head was aching. Doctor McAndrew gave me some Homeopathic medicine and prescribed rest and quiet in the house all day. Dinner – meat, potatoes, white bread, buns, butter, greens, lettuce, blanc-mange, strawberries. Supper – white bread, buns, gems, butter, ginger bread, blackberry sauce, oranges. Aunt was not very well.

"Friday, May 27th, 1870 – I had a good, sound nights' rest; awakened very much refreshed. Aunt is better also. Breakfast – potatoes, eggs, white bread, Johnny cake, buns and butter. This morning I was allowed to roam about at pleasure, and, what a panorama is spread out before me. Standing in the hall – I could see the Huron winding in graceful curves and encircling Independence Isle. The banks are overshadowed on either side with trees and shrubbery. The beautiful flowing stream sending back an exhilarating reflection from the smooth surface. In the



rear of the Cure is a foot bridge leading to the bath house, which consists of three rooms where patients take treatment. A pair of stairs leads down to the swimming yard, an en-closure with ropes and poles arranged for beginners. Coming back to the house I took a view from the chamber windows of the new part, conveniently fitted up this season for the accommodations of patients of Doctor McAndrew. Here we can see the iron bridge and the dam and flouring mill below the new Union School building. Mr. Gilbert's residence in the city, and away beyond, fruitful fields and promising harvests.

"While enjoying this prospect the bell calls to dinner, made all the more enjoyable by having taken a stroll in the pure air, and drank in its healthy inspiration. The table was supplied with fish, potatoes, white bread, graham ham bread, gems, buns, butter, strawberry short cake. In the afternoon we had a sitz bath. Supper: Bread, biscuit, crackers, cream crackers, raspberry sauce cake.

"Saturday, May 28 – Another good night's rest. Breakfast – potatoes, eggs, white bread, johnny cake, graham mush, crackers. Mrs. Loveridge says, "Dr. McAndrew will make the roses come to your cheeks." Ma called and I went home with her to spend the Sabbath. We think our home in many respects is a model one; especially our method of spending the

Sabbath. The most delightful part of the day is after dinner, when we all take our *Bibles* and read a chapter (four out of the seven children can read). Having read, Pa calls upon each of us to stand up and recount the special scenes and incidents in the chapter.

“After this, we have a good sing, Ma usually playing on the piano and taking the lead. Pa calls it the Pattison Choir. Then Pa commends us all to the kind Heavenly Parent, whose goodness and mercy has been vouchsafed to us.

“Wednesday morning, June 1st – I went back to the Cure. Had a sitz and shower bath. Dinner: fish, potatoes, turnips, white gems, Graham biscuit, beans, butter, lettuce, pudding, and pie. Supper: white gems, butter, raspberries, white cake, and Graham cake.

“Thursday, June 2nd – Took a vapor bath and a swim in the river. Dinner: chicken, potatoes, brown bread, brown biscuit, white gems, asparagus, butter and lettuce.

“Friday, June 3rd – Breakfast: potatoes, eggs, Johnny cake, steamed bread mush, Graham biscuit, wheat bread, Graham gems. Supper: white gems, white ginger crackers, strawberries. The same treatment as yesterday. Dinner: Steak, potatoes, turnips, radishes, brown bread, gems, white bread, strawberry



short cake, custard pie. Supper: bread, gems, white bread, ginger crackers, and strawberries.

“Saturday, June 4th – Cold meals, potatoes, white gems, white bread, corn bread, apple sauce, and mush. About half past ten, went in swimming as usual. Dinner: steak, meat pie, potatoes, turnips, asparagus, white bread, steamed bread, white tapioca pudding, custard pie. Supper: white bread, steamed bread, white cake, canned peaches, raspberries. So ended one week at the “Rest for the Weary.”

“P.S. Oct. 25th – A few weeks since Aunt Lizzie went home, looking and feeling like a new creature. Mrs. Loveridge has also gone home very much improved. Only one week wrought wonders with me. The “Rest for the Weary” is an appropriate name. Dr. McAndrew is a very pleasant and talented woman, making the “Rest” a sunshiny one for her afflicted patients. I am told that this is the only Water Cure in the country embracing a swimming park. This is the crowning glory of the Institution, the patients learning to swim during the summer months in the limpid currents of the Huron. On the banks of our beautiful river, though right in the centre of the city, yet possessing fine landscape views, is a place where those desiring rest and recovery of health, can find an abundance of both cheerful society, plenty of fun, and faithful medical attendance.”





Albert P. Marshall  
Professor Emeritus, Eastern Michigan University

List of Publications

A Guide to Negro Periodical Literature (1941)

North Carolina Index, First Issue (1942)

Soldiers Dream: A Pictorial History of Lincoln  
University (1966)

The "Real McCoy" of Ypsilanti (1989)

Unconquerable Souls: The History of the African  
American in Ypsilanti (1993)

A Tradition of Service: The African Methodist Episcopal  
Church in Ypsilanti (1993)

Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church,  
Ypsilanti, Michigan (1995)

The Legendary 4-Horsemen of the African Methodist  
Episcopal Church (1996)





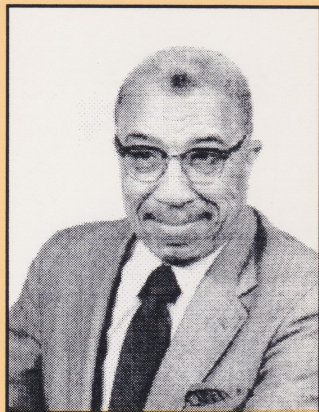


# Helen Walker McAndrew:

## Ypsilanti's Lady Frontier Doctor

By William McAndrew Jr.

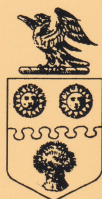
Edited with additions by Albert P. Marshall



Albert P. Marshall, Professor Emeritus, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan, has long been recognized as a distinguished historian of African Americans.

Molded in the Oklahoma dust bowls of the early twentieth century, he moved to Kansas City, Missouri in 1928, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Lincoln University of Missouri ten years later. His first job was Assistant Librarian at Lincoln University where his research and writing career was launched. He became Director of Library of Eastern Michigan University in 1969 and was promoted to Dean of Academic Services in 1973. He retired as Professor Emeritus in July, 1980.

To order *Helen Walker McAndrew: Ypsilanti's Lady Frontier Doctor*, or other publications by Professor Marshall, write to: MARLAN Publications,  
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